The Fountain of Youth

St. Augustine, Florida

THE FOUNTAIN of YOUTH

By Oliver Wendell Holmes

From Vol. 32, Atlantic Monthly, pp. 209-10. Read at the meeting of the Harvard Alumni Association, June 25, 1873.

The font the Spaniard sought in vain
Leaps glittering from the sandy plain
Our classic grove embowers,
Here youth, unchanging blooms and smiles,
Here dwells eternal spring,
And warms from Hope's eternal isles
The winds their perfume bring.

Here every leaf is in the bud
Each singing throat in tune,
And bright o'er evenings silver flood
Shines the young crescent moon.
What wonder age forgets his staff
And lays his glasses down,
And gray-haired grandsires look and laugh
As when their locks were brown!

With ears grown dull and eyes grown dim
They greet the joyous day
That calls them to the fountain's brim
To wash their years away.
What change has clothed the ancient sire
In sudden youth? For, lo!
The Judge, the Doctor, and the Squire
Are Jack and Bill and Joe.

And be his titles what they will,
In spite of manhood's claim
The gray beard is a school-boy still
And loves his school-boy name:
It calms the ruler's stormy breast
Whom hurrying care pursues,
And brings a sense of peace and rest,
Like slippers after shoes.

And what are all the prizes won
To youth's enchanted view?
And what is all the man has done
To what the boy may do?
O blessed font, whose waters flow
Alike for sire and son,
That melts our winter's frost and snow,
And makes all ages one!

I pledge the sparkling fountain's tide
That flings its golden shower
With age to fill and youth to guide,
Still fresh in morning flower.
Flow on with ever-widening stream,
In ever brightening morn,
Our story's pride, our future's dream,
The hope of times unborn.

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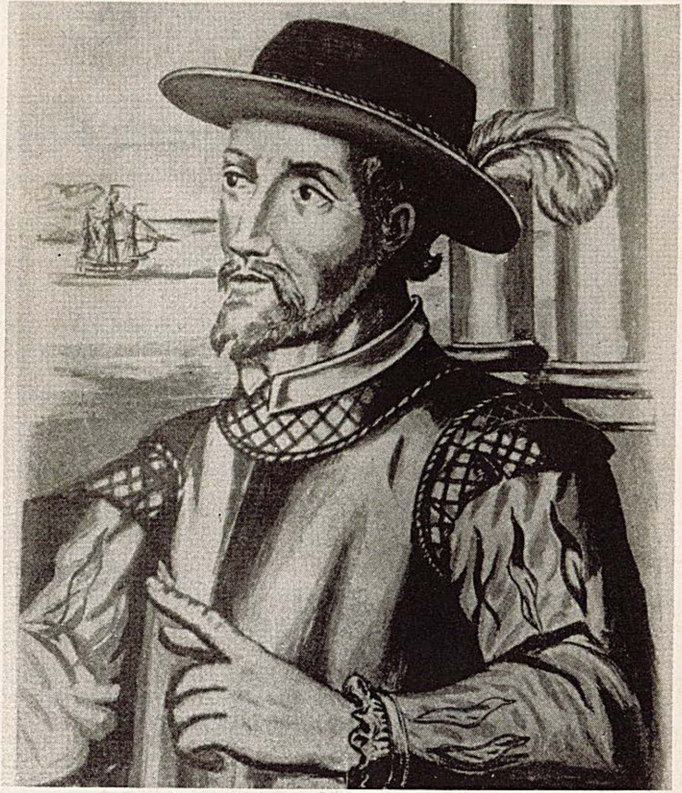
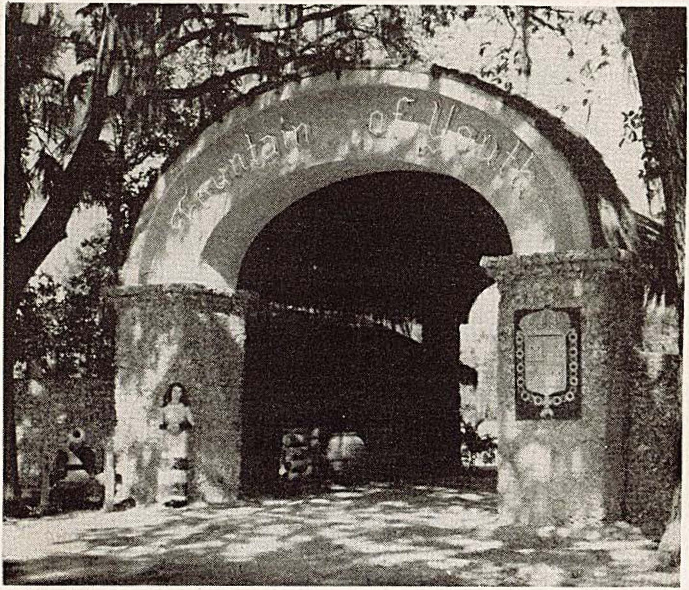
The
FOUNTAIN of YOUTH
and
ANCIENT INDIAN VILLAGE
AND
BURIAL GROUND

ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA



Juan Ponce de Leon who discovered Florida on April 2, 1513. He first sighted land close to what is now Saint Augustine Inlet. On Sunday, April 3, 1513, he landed; naming his landing place La Florida. On old Spanish maps this inlet is named Bara de la Florida.



North Entrance to Fountain of Youth Park

THE FOUNTAIN of YOUTH

Woven into the fabric of legend, far older than written history, has been the belief that somewhere our good Mother Earth held hidden the secret of an elixir, with power to roll back oppressive-years of age, so that tottering greybeards might again enjoy those pleasures of youth which had become but memories. Folklore of all nations abounds with references, mythologies contain specific instances, religions make allegorical use of this primitive longing. One need but recall the oriental tales brought by Persians into Greece; the myth of Medea's Cauldron; the miraculous fountain by which Prester

Horse-Drawn Carriages Still in Use

John lived 526 years; the sweet savored well at Piombe which Sir John Maundeville claimed to have discovered; to realize how old, and how widespread, had become this belief in rejuvenation, even as early as the 13th century. Many an Old World traveler, having searched in vain, had given up in despair. Discovery of the New World brought reviving hope, for here, far away from any influence of civilized tradition, the legend was found flourishing in the minds of untutored aborigines. What Europe was gradually coming to believe a mere figment of imagination now took on the semblance of acknowledged fact.

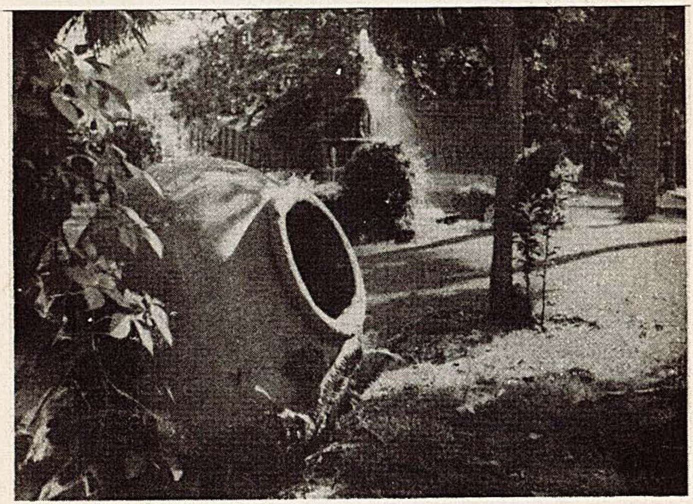
All the natives encountered on early voyages to the West Indies knew of the existence of a Fountain of Youth. Men had gone in search of it and never returned..What better proof could there be that they had found it? Would any sane person leave such a treasure once he had proof of its magical qualities?

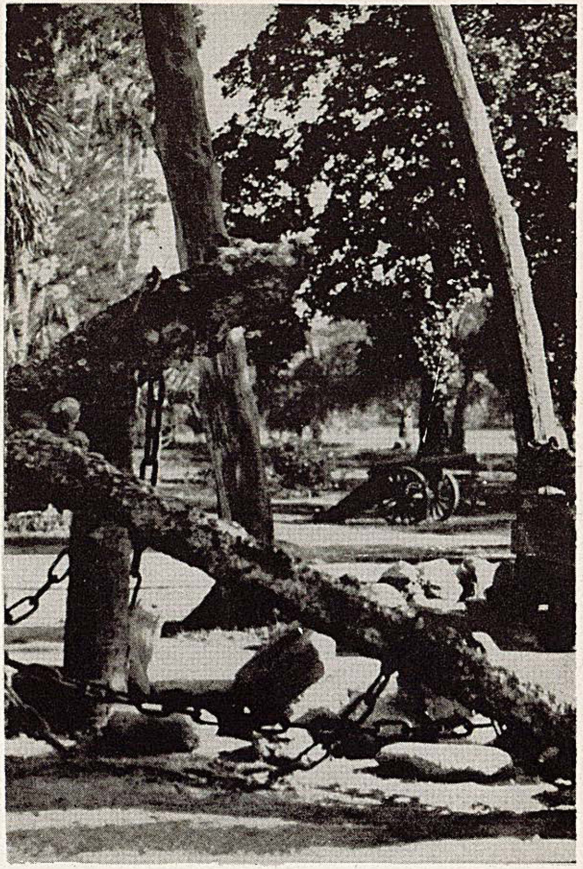
The natives of Central and South America knew the legend equally well and firmly believed it for truth.

It was told by Indian mistresses, to their Spanish lovers, with a wealth of detail which indicated long acceptance, implicit belief and even a knowledge of exact location.

"Far to the north lies an island called Bimini in which there is a fountain and a river. Whoever drinks the miraculous water, or bathes in the stream, becomes young again. Many have gone from Cuba and never returned. A man named Andreas went there from the Bahamas, an old man. He returned again, young and vigorous, married and had many children." Some even claimed to have met the children of Andreas and talked with them.

Garden Scene



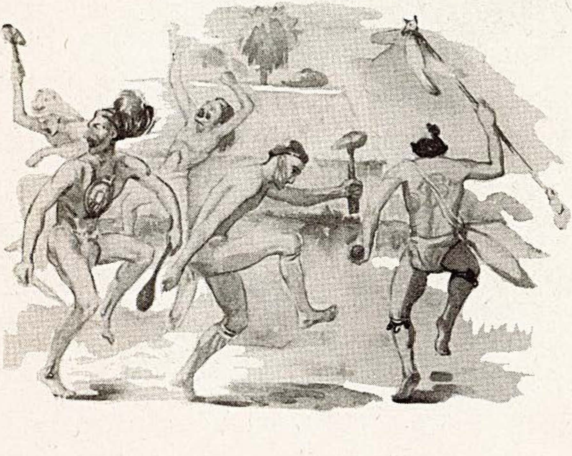


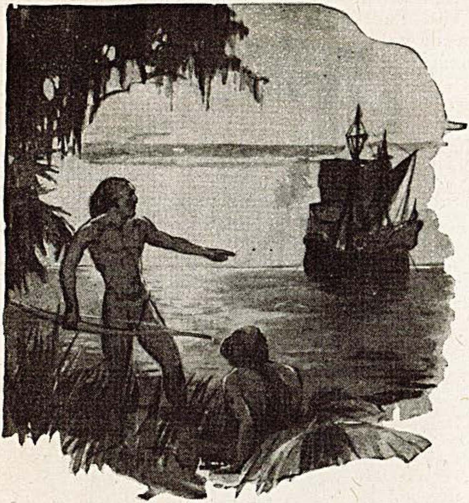
Anchor and Cannon Believed Used by the French—1565

The Conquistadors lived in a credulous age. Each explorer brought home tales of marvels he had seen; singing fish; islands of women; men with tails; golden cities—nothing seemed improbable. Indeed the genuine wonders of the New World were so many that exaggeration seemed impossible.

Juan Ponce de Leon

Among the many Spaniards who heard the legend of the Fountain of Youth was Juan Ponce de Leon. Born in the Villa of San Tervas de Campos (about 35 miles northwest of Valladolid) of noble parentage, for he was a direct descendant of Don Pedro Ponce de Minerva who had married a daughter of King Alfonso IX of Leon, having served throughout the ten

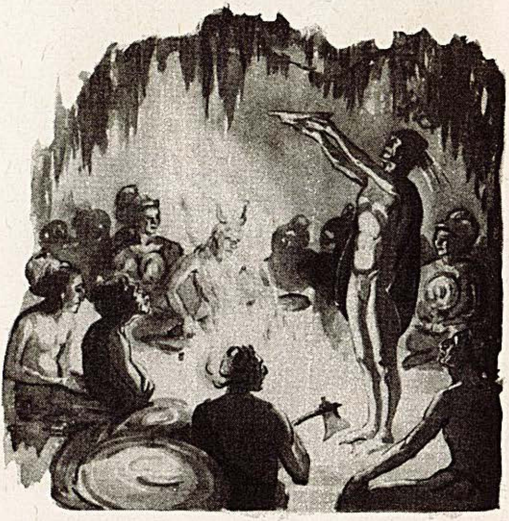


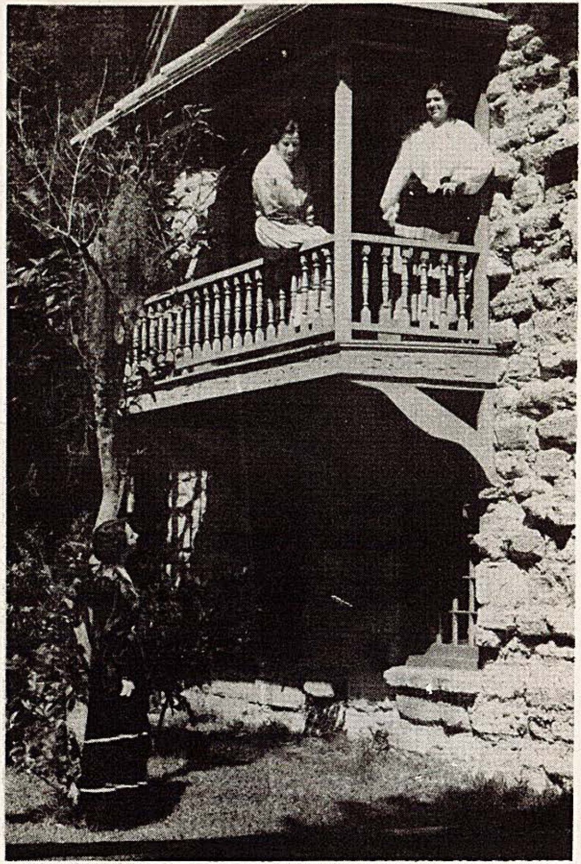


years continuous war against the Moors, known as the Wars of Granada, Juan Ponce came to America on the second voyage of Christopher Columbus, Arriving at the Island of Hayti, in 1493, he served as a soldier, without promotion, until Columbus was removed from control of the Indies. Made Captain of the Company of Santo Domingo by Bobadilla, he was appointed Governor of the Province of Higuey by Ovando and in 1508 explored the Island of Puerto Rico, founding the first settlement of Europeans there at Caparra.

Through development of extensive plantations on the Islands of Hayti and Puerto Rico, and through his discovery and development of gold mines on the latter island, he was made its Governor and acquired a considerable fortune. When by a decision of the High Court of Spain control of the Indies was partially restored to the Columbus family, Don Diego, the Great Navigator's son, who was appointed Governor General, soon removed Juan Ponce de Leon from office; but as a reward for his services King Ferdinand offered him license to discover and colonize any unexplored lands he might select.

Ponce de Leon asked to be granted rights to the Island of Bimini.



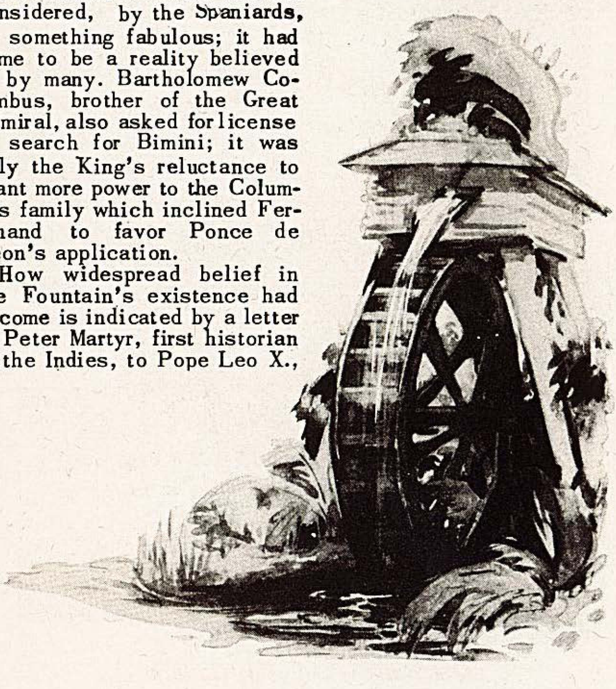


Old Balcony—Museum Building

Search for the Fountain of Youth and Discovery of Florida

The general impression is that Juan Ponce de Leon set out suddenly, on a romantic expedition, because he was growing old and wished to be made young again; this, however, is far from the truth. At the time this exploration was undertaken the Fountain of Youth was not considered, by the Spaniards, as something fabulous; it had come to be a reality believed in by many. Bartholomew Columbus, brother of the Great Admiral, also asked for license to search for Bimini; it was only the King's reluctance to grant more power to the Columbus family which inclined Ferdinand to favor Ponce de Leon's application.

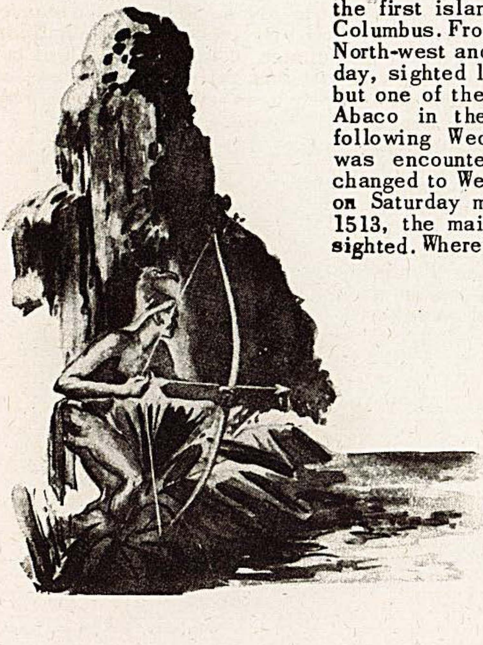
How widespread belief in the Fountain's existence had become is indicated by a letter of Peter Martyr, first historian of the Indies, to Pope Leo X.,



"For they have so spread this rumor throughout all the Court, that not only the people, but also many of them whom wisdom or fortune have divided from the common sort, think it to be true."

It is interesting to note that no sooner had Ponce de Leon asked for license to discover Bimini than he was peremptorily summoned to Spain by King Ferdinand for a personal audience. What do you think they talked about?

Hurriedly returning from his voyage to Spain, Juan Ponce de Leon set sail from Puerto Rico, on March 3, 1513, with three ships, one of which was named San Cristobal. Taking an indirect course through the southern Bahamas he stopped for several days at San Salvador, the first island discovered by Columbus. From here he sailed North-west and, on Easter Sunday, sighted land, not Bimini, but one of the keys near Great Abaco in the Bahamas. The following Wednesday a storm was encountered; the course changed to West-northwest and on Saturday morning, April 2, 1513, the mainland coast was sighted. Where?



The only statement approximating accuracy is that given by the Spanish Historian Antonio de Herrera. The following quotation is taken from the first edition of his Historia General, published during his lifetime, and is translated from the copy in the Library of Congress.

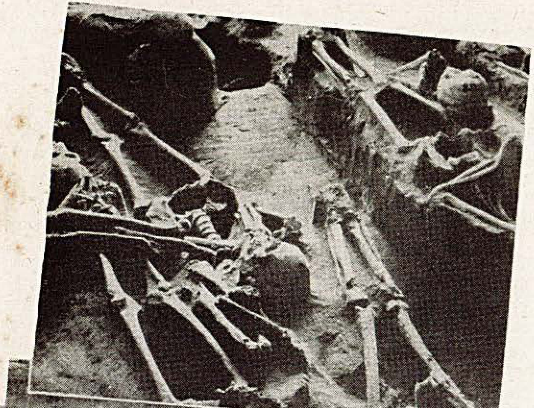
". . . and afterward until the second of April, running West-northwest, the water went diminishing to nine fathoms, at one league from land, which was in thirty degrees and eight minutes, they ran along the coast seeking harbor, and the night anchored near land, in eight fathoms of water. And thinking this land was an island, they called it *La Florida* . . .' He went on land to take information and possession. Friday the eighth they set sail . . ."

The nearest approach to a definite location, in this statement of Herrera's, is the latitude given, 30°-08' at a league (3.43 nautical miles) from shore. By present determinations this is 14 nautical miles (14 minutes of latitude) north of St. Augustine Inlet. On maps of different periods the latitude of this Inlet so widely varies that it is given anywhere from 29°-30' to 30°-10', hence it is but natural to doubt the accuracy of Herrera's statement and to consider what corrections should be applied to it.

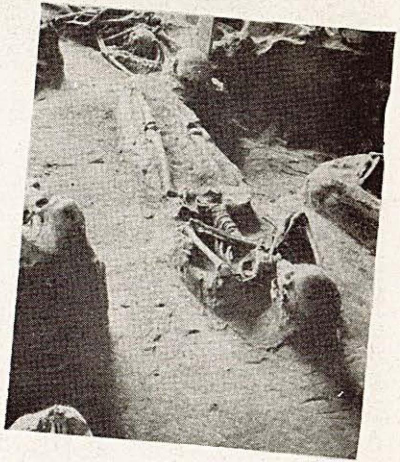
Taking a latitude, as practiced in Juan Ponce de Leon's time, was a simple matter and could be

done with approximate accuracy. The observer measured the angular height of the Sun at apparent local noon; then consulted his tables to find the Sun's declination (angular distance north or south of the Equator) for that particular day. By the addition, or subtraction, of these two quantities he could determine his angular distance north or south of the Equator, that is his latitude. Neglecting inaccuracy of his instrument (and though crude in design these old instruments produced some remarkably accurate results) there were two major sources of error. The instrument might be wrongly read or there might be errors in the table giving the Sun's declination.

Anton Alaminos, Juan Ponce de Leon's Chief Pilot, was an experienced man. It may be assumed that he accurately mea-



Scenes of Indian Burial Ground of Seloy



The Alphonsine Tables, having been prepared under patronage of a Spanish King, would logically be the tables used by a Spanish navigator. However, the errors of both tables are here taken into consideration in.correcting the 30°-08' latitude of Herrera's statement.

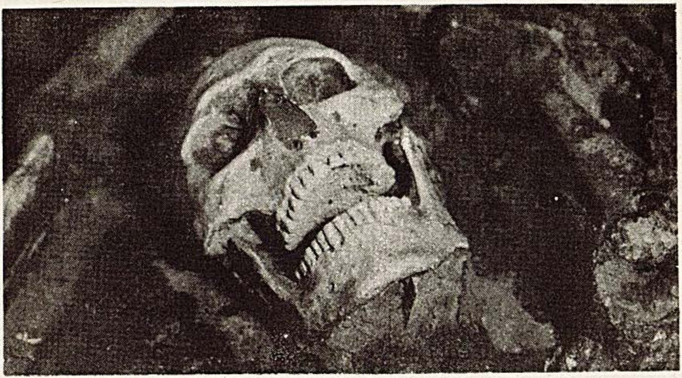
30°-08'
Minus 09 Regiomontanus, or least Alphonsine, error.
29 -59 Latitude correctedfor error in declination.

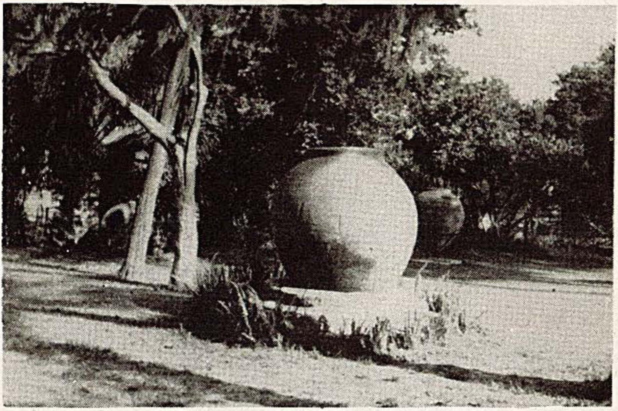
30°-08'
Minus 18 Greatest Alphonsine error.
29 -50 Latitude corrected for error in declination.

The 1939 North Latitude of St. Augustine Inlet, as determined by U.S. Engineers is 29°-54'.

A minute of latitude closely approximates a nautical mile. It becomes evident when this mathematically accurate correction, which neither Anton Alaminos or Herrera was aware of,

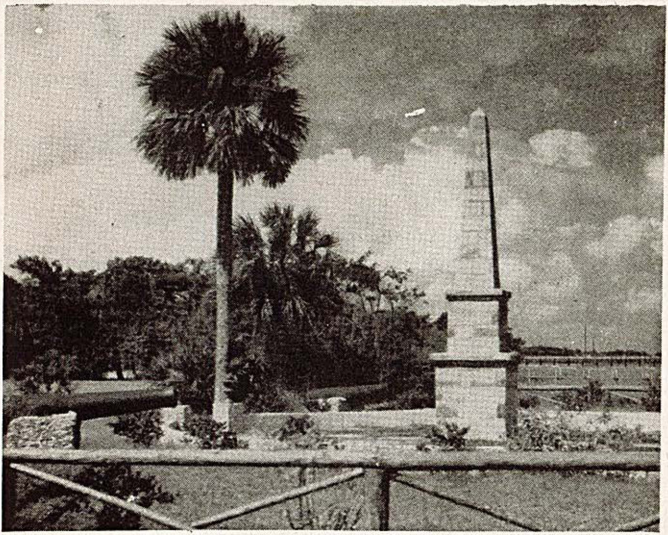
This Indian was an old man at time of death, as shown by smoothly worn teeth.





Tinajone (Ancient water jars)

Interior—Showing Fountain and 15-13 Cross

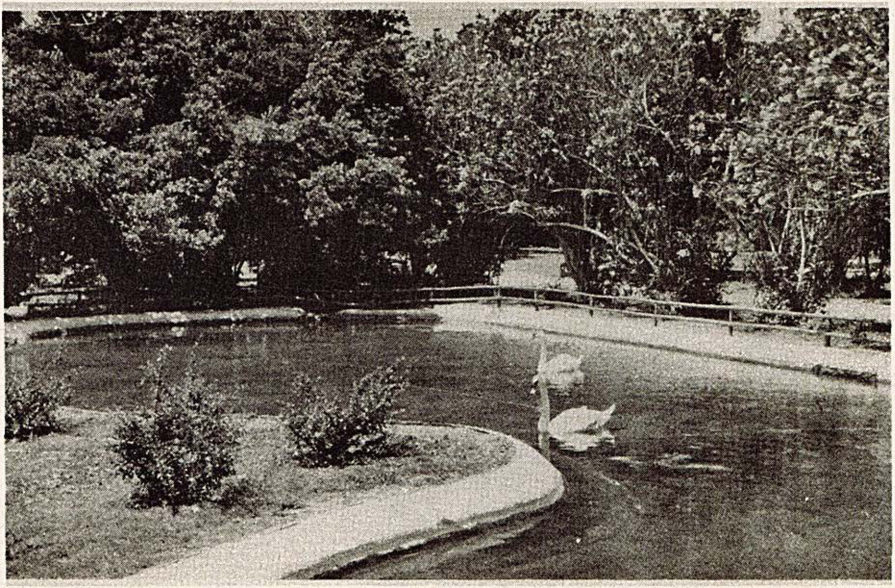


Monument Marking Landing Place of Ponce de Leon

is applied to the 30°-08' observation, that Juan Ponce de Leon was not 14 nautical miles north of St. Augustine, but somewhere between 4 miles south and 5 miles north of the Inlet. The lookout, at the masthead, estimated to be 65 feet above the water, would be able to see objects at sea level almost 10 miles distant. Both the Harbor, and the surf breaking on the bar outside of it, would be in plain view.

Returning to the Herrera quotation, "they ran along the coast seeking harbor", (no direction mentioned) can be understood to mean that they saw St. Augustine Harbor "seeking" the channel to come into it, and, it was from this Harbor "on Friday the eighth they set sail".

"He went on shore to take information", the Spanish word used is *lengua*, literally "tongue". That is Juan Ponce de



Swans on the Lake at the Fountain of Youth Park

Leon expected to get information by talking to somebody. Where would be the best place to find someone to talk to? Naturally it would be at an Indian village.

There remains to be considered the name *La Florida*. Further along in the Herrera account is found "they could not know in the beginning the name *La Florida* had . . . but in the end . . . the Indians said that it was called Cautio", and that in leaving the Bahamas, "for fear of the currents that another time were throwing the vessels to the coast of *La Florida*, or Cautio (as they then said) they turned their route to the Island of San Juan de Puerto Rico."

The name *La Florida* was not again applied to the whole peninsula until Juan Ponce de Leon went to Spain to obtain confirmation of his rights to colonize the lands he had discovered. Many old Spanish maps show *Bara de la Florida* as the name of St. Augustine inlet. It is significant that this name was never applied, as a local name, at any other point in Spain's North American possessions.

Fountain of Youth Park

The ancient Indian village of Seloy was located where Fountain of Youth Park now is when Pedro Menendez de Aviles founded St. Augustine in 1565. It was old then, how old no one knows, but beyond all question old enough to have been visited by Juan Ponce de Leon, only fifty-two years earlier, when he landed to obtain information.

Indian Burials brought to light on this site take high rank among archeological discoveries in the United States. No similar burial of such numbers of people, or in the periods indicated by them, has been found. Nearly 100 skeletons, male and female adults, young children and infants, have been brought to view. Many more, of even earlier periods are still covered; some so deeply buried that they are now below normal water level.

What more fitting spot could be found for a memorial to the earliest efforts toward establishing European civilization in the present United States? Here is where Juan Ponce de Leon came to seek information in 1513. Here came Rene Laudonniere, in 1564, to exchange gifts with the Indians of Seloy, sounding the harbor entrance, naming it "River of Dolphins", then going farther north to build Fort Caroline. Here, in 1565, Pedro Menendez de Aviles fortified the great communal house of the Cacique of Seloy; and here all three Europeans found evidence of a native civilization stretching back into the dim vistas of time before the New World was discovered by Columbus.

What more fitting memorial than this beautiful Park?

Shaded by giant Magnolia Grandiflora with their great creamy petalled cups, flooding the air with their insistent alluring fragrance at the Easter Season, each year recalling that Feast of Flowers hundreds of years ago, the *Pascua Florida* which Juan Ponce de Leon memorialized when he gave his first landing place its name. Here, sheltering aboriginal bones, is a replica of the ancient Timucuan Communal House, faithfully copied from drawings of the French artist, Le Moyne des Morgues, who accompanied Laudonniere to the ill-fated Huguenot Fort Caroline. Gazing on it one may easily visualize Pedro Menendez converting such a house into a fort. Near by, suitably enshrined in a *coquina* shelter of old Spanish design, is the spring which Juan Ponce de Leon first sampled in his search for the Fountain of Youth. How eagerly he must have taken his first drink of this water. With what impatience must he have expected the results, and then, after five days, taking his ship's casks filled from this very spring, decided to sail on, still hoping to feel renewed vigor if the treatment was continued.

Throughout the Park and Museum will be found many objects full of interest and worthy of study. Heavy cannon from Morro Castle, others retrieved from ships wrecked on the Florida coast and one carried by the U.S.S. Constitution in the days when we had "wooden ships and iron men"; while ancient anchors from the Florida sands bear mute testimony of the days when many galleons, sailing the Bahama Channel, which Juan Ponce de Leon discovered, met with hurricanes no cable could withstand. Nor are cannons the only mementos of early warfare; in the Museum will be found arrow heads and great bows and arrows such as those used by the Timucuans, against which Spanish armor was no protection, and specimens of early clumsy firearms whose thunderous roar and greater range drove the Indians beyond bowshots. There are also mementos of peaceful life; great earthen water jars, the *botijas* in which olive oil was brought from Spain and many other objects of art or interest; too many to be listed here.

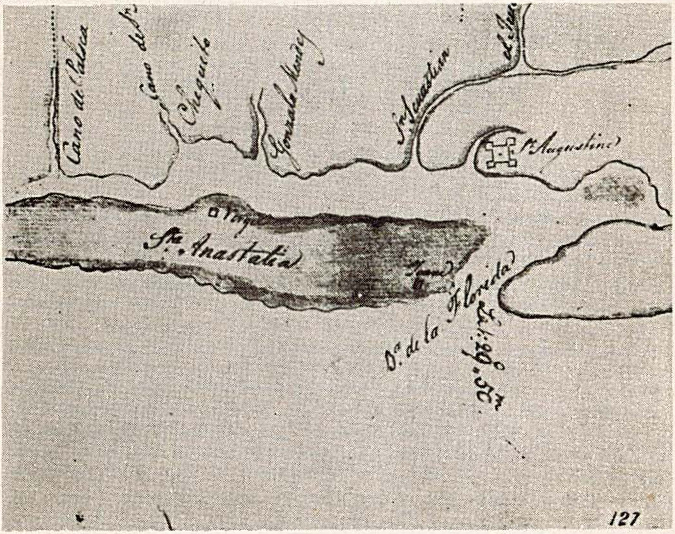
Palms, native Florida shrubs and trees lend beauty and shade to the grounds, while an avenue of old oleanders leads to the east, and Harbor shore, where a simple coquina shaft calls attention to the landing of Juan Ponce de Leon on April 3, 1513.

Practical Value of Juan Ponce de Leon's Discoveries

Though Juan Ponce will always be first remembered for his association with the romantic legend of the Fountain of Youth and the discovery and naming of Florida there were additional results from his voyage which are often ignored. He was the first to sail in that part of the Atlantic Ocean just north of the Great Bahama Bank, thus establishing the northern limit of this archipelago. He discovered the Gulf Stream, in the Bahama Channel, crossing it three times during the voyage and establishing that it flowed eastward between Cuba and Florida and northward between Florida and the Bahamas. Anton Alaminos, Juan Ponce's Chief Pilot, using information acquired on this voyage, established a new sea route to Spain, in 1519, thus making Havana the most important seaport of the West Indies. Here treasure was gathered from Mexico, Peru and even as far off as the Philippine Islands, to be carried once a year in great galleons, under escort of the Armada of the Indies , through the Bahama Channel and then across the Atlantic to Cadiz.

The command of this new sea route was fought for by France. England and Holland. St. Augustine was fortified by Spain to insure its protection, which it did for many years. In the end England won; but in the beginning it was Juan Ponce de Leon, adventuring for the land of the Fountain of Youth, who discovered the great current now known to all navigators, and this in turn brought the first continuing European settlement to what is now the United States.

Old Spanish Map of St. Augustine Harbor. The Original is in the British Colonial Office


Cano de Palica
Chiquito
Sn. Augustin
St. Augustine
Vigia
Sta. Anastatia
Bo. de la Florida

ON THE OLDEST WHITE MAN'S ROAD

The road by which this Oldest School House stands is the oldest permanent path made by white men north of Mexico. Much of Saint Augustine's history is intimately linked to this long travelled highway. It is fitting to describe its part in the development of the Oldest City as an introduction to the period when the Old School House was new.

WHEN THE SPANIARDS CAME

This high ground Indian trail became a white man's road with the arrival of Spanish soldiers in 1565, thirty-four years before the first English settlers landed at Jamestown and fifty-five years before the Mayflower anchored off Plymouth Rock. Even earlier than this the location had been visited by Spaniards. In 1513 Juan Ponce de Leon first sighted the coast close to the harbor here. It was he who gave the harbor entrance the name Bara de la Florida shown on old Spanish maps. During the five days which he remained at his first landing place there can be little doubt that his men passed this way in their explorations.

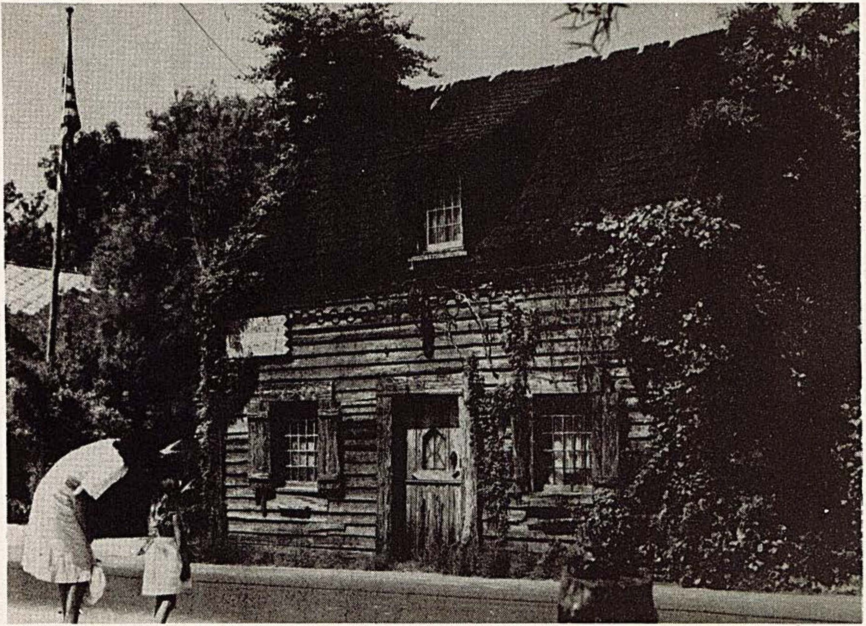
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, Washington, D.C.
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE HISTORIC BUILDING
Known as

OLD SCHOOL HOUSE in the County of St. Johns and the State of Florida has been selected by the advisory committee of the HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY as possessing exceptional historic or architectural interest and as being worthy of the most careful preservation for the benefit of future generations and that to this end a record of its present appearance and condition has been made and deposited for permanent reference in the

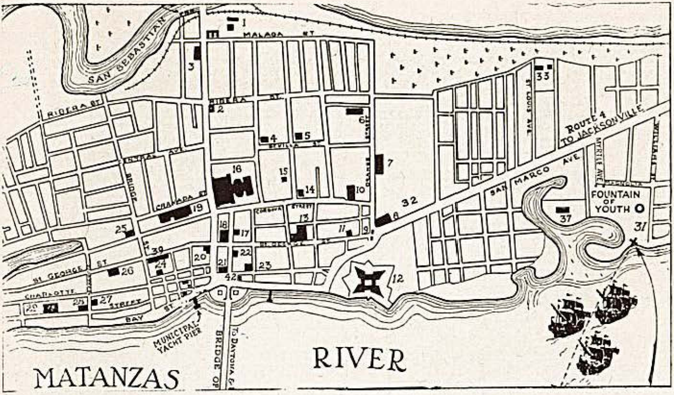
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

HAROLD L. ICKES.
Secretary of the Interior.

Attest:
BERNARD W. CLOSE,
District Officer.



Oldest Wooden School House in U.S.A.


SAN SEBASTIAN
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POINTS OF INTEREST

As Shown on the Map in old St. Augustine

1. Florida East Coast Railway Station and Offices.
2. Southern M.E. Church.
3. Florida East Coast Hospital.
4. Memorial Presbyterian Church.
5. Ancient City Baptist Church.
6. Ketterlinus High School.
7. Junior High School.
8. Old Huguenot Cemetery.
9. City Gates—part of old city wall in 1620.
10. Old Spanish Cemetery.
11. OLDEST SCHOOL HOUSE
12. Fort Marion.
13. City Building.
14. Grace M.E. Church, North.
15. Christian Science Church.
16. Ponce de Leon Hotel (world's finest tourist hotel).
18. Post Office—formerly Spanish Governor's Mansion.
19. Alcazar Hotel and Casino.
20. Episcopal Church.
21. Old Slave Market.
22. Cathedral.
23. Court House.
24. Don Toledo House.
25. Record Company, one of the South's largest printing plants.
26. Cathedral Lyceum.
27. Oldest House—Historical Society.
28. State Arsenal, formerly Franciscan Monastery.
29. National Cemetery.
31. FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH
32. Civic Center and Chamber of Commerce
33. Garnett Orange Grove
34. Anastasia Light House.
35. Light House Park
36. Davenport Park.
37. La Leche Cemetery.
38. Alligator Farm.
39. St. Joseph's Academy.
40. State School for the Deaf and the Blind.
42. Hamblen Club.

Bus Station, opposite Hotel Ponce de Leon.

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